



El Salvador

MCC Learning from

“Evaluation of the Non-Formal Skills Development Sub-Activity of the Millennium Challenge Corporation’s Compact with the Government of El Salvador”

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MCC has identified the following programmatic and evaluation lessons based on the Evaluation of the Non-Formal Skills Development Sub-Activity of the Millennium Challenge Corporation’s Compact with the Government of El Salvador.

PROGRAMMATIC LESSONS

- *Projects should integrate new activities into the existing system and improve the system where necessary.* Within the ITCHA improvement component, new MEGATEC degree programs were created. However, the new MEGATEC degree programs were not integrated into the existing education system, so at the end of the compact it remained unclear how MEGATEC degrees could be used to partially fulfill university requirements. In addition, teacher training took place by consultants paid with compact funds during implementation, but no MEGATEC teacher training program was formally set-up to continue on-boarding new teachers or for continual professional development of existing teachers. This means that new teachers receive informal training from fellow teachers, which puts the reputation of the MEGATEC degrees at risk. It’s important to analyze whether or not a one-off training of teachers represents the highest return or if a systematic improvement to teacher training would provide higher returns.
- *Sustainability mechanisms need to be incorporated into project design from the beginning.* Even though many of the components of the Education and Training Activity have been found to have short-term impacts, there is concern about the sustainability of some of the investments, and therefore the sustainability of impacts on outcomes. For example, the funding for scholarships ended with the compact and it is now the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (MINED) to continue providing them or find another provider. The scholarships did not solve a systematic issue of students not being able to cover transportation and meal costs to attend school. Without continuation of the scholarship program, these constraints will remain significant barriers to students.

EVALUATION LESSONS

- *Regular analysis of labor markets is an important aspect of providing quality education and training.* This set of interim evaluations was unable to fully analyze employment outcomes; however, preliminary results from the ITCHA/MEGATEC evaluation suggest that there may not be enough local labor market demand to absorb secondary school and ITCHA graduates, particularly graduates with alternative tourism degrees. This highlights the importance of having a mechanism for conducting labor market analysis on a regular basis and feeding this information into curriculums and other aspects of education and training.
- *Project design determines what can be evaluated.* An evaluation cannot establish the differential impact of individual components of a package of interventions unless the project is designed to test different components. To do so, different pieces of the package would have to be provided to different groups of beneficiaries. If a package is provided in its entirety, the package will be evaluated and the evaluator will not be able to disentangle the impacts of individual components. This has been illustrated through the evaluation of the Technical Secondary School Strengthening. The evaluation cannot tell us if the increased enrollment is coming from improved infrastructure, better trained teachers, new curriculum, or scholarships. If, for example, scholarships had been made available to a sub-set of students in the comparison schools, the evaluation would have been able to more easily tease out the impact of the school strengthening from the impact of the scholarship. Programs that include all of these components may be more expensive than necessary; however, without evaluating the different combinations of components, the most efficient allocation of resources is unknown.
- *Project design determines feasibility of evaluation type and methodology.* The design of the non-formal training program was demand-driven. In other words, training was provided in communities that requested training (note that this is different from being driven by labor market demand). In addition, MCC was informed from the beginning that there would be no excess demand – there would be no community that requested training that would not be provided with training. Since the program was able to cover every community, it was impossible to identify a strong comparison group up-front. The opposite occurred with the scholarship program, as described in the next lesson.

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- *Random assignment can be a fair and transparent mechanism to distribute finite resources and allow for a rigorous impact evaluation.* In El Salvador, random assignment was seen as a fair way to distribute scholarships when qualified demand exceeded supply. Scholarships were offered for multiple years and the random selection was only conducted in the year where there were more qualified applicants who met the minimum criteria than scholarships available. By randomly offering scholarships, the applicants who were not offered scholarships were similar to those offered scholarships and thus created a strong control group to measure impact. The random assignment method (a computerized lottery conducted publicly) was transparent and it was clear that each eligible applicant had an equal chance to receive the scholarship.
- *Projects and evaluations should invest in improving the quality and availability of administrative data.* Much of the data used for these evaluations comes from administrative records from MINED. Within MINED, school-level and student-level data come from two different departments and they are not consistent with each other. The two data sources use different definitions for counting enrollment, drop-outs from one school are not tracked to see if they enroll in a different school, and some records have been found incomplete. Unfortunately, MCC did not design the project or the evaluation to invest in improving data quality or availability and therefore, the data used for analysis by MINED and by evaluators has significant weaknesses which limit the quality of decisions that can be made based on those data. The quality of data and the use of data within MINED could be improved to help manage El Salvador's education sector not to mention improve the accuracy of evaluation analyses.